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PERSONAL NARRATIVES
OF EVENTS IN THE
WAR OF THE REBELLION,
BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

THIRD SERIES — No. 1.

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L I F E

ON THE

TEXAN BLOCKADE.

BY

WILLIAM F. HUTCHINSON, M. D.

LATE SURGEON U. S. NAVY.

PROVIDENCE:

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LIFE ON THE TEXAN BLOCKADE.

[Read before the Society April 17, 1883.]

So many years have passed since the scenes were enacted which I shall try to recall, that, to the actors therein, they seem but dreams — airy structures in the deepest recesses of remembrance. Perhaps they have become still more like shadows, since they were not of a nature to be quickly recalled; being, for the most part, dull iterations of a routine life which grew so terribly monotonous, after years of it had been passed, that its influence over memory's usually firm grasp, was to cause it to be thrown aside as quickly as possible. The few brilliant exceptions, the occasional chase, the still rarer boat expeditions or attacks upon fortifications, burned themselves a little deeper into the tablets of those years; and when one essays to recall what happened at such or

such a time, the exceptions come first, and are apt to quite over-cloud the more ordinary matters of our old-time quiet ocean life. But whatever interest this paper may possess, must attach only to a sketch of that existence as a whole, and be drawn from things that then seemed trivial, but are now become, by lapse of time, of quite a respectable magnitude. When those to whom these papers are a legacy, and to whom they may be of actual use, come to look them over, it will be, I am persuaded, these very little things of the soldier's or sailor's daily life, these minutiae now so little thought of, which will first attract attention,—and having attracted, will hold it. In preparing this paper, I have drawn largely from a diary which I kept at the time, and take the liberty to transcribe the first page as a fitting introduction.

On board the United States steam sloop-of-war "Lackawanna," flag-ship of the second division of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, I commence this record on the fifth day of February, 1865, proposing to keep a diary of such incidents in our monotonous life as shall seem worthy of being written; both for my own amusement and to fulfill a promise.

It may, at some future time, prove interesting to friends who have no idea of blockade life, beyond the scanty facts gleaned from newspapers or occasional letters from loved ones doing penance at various points upon our southern coast.

“And weary was the long patrol,
The thousand miles of shapeless strand,
From Brazos to San Blas that roll,
Their drifting dunes of desert sand.”

It will be seen that the scene opens at a time when the war was rapidly drawing to a close, when the victorious operations of our forces had placed almost the entire coast line again under the dominion of the old flag, and when Texas, with its isolated vast territory, was practically the only region yet unattacked. To the very last, its geographical position protected it from serious attack, and but for Banks' abortive Red River movement, the war was carried on by the navy, operating by means of a more or less rigid blockade. A glance at the map will show that this was by no means so difficult a task as the mere extent of Texan coast line would seem to indicate; for there are few harbors on its whole length,

and only one of these, Galveston, capable of affording entrance to vessels of moderate draught.

Let us, then, begin our story here,—sitting in an open port, gazing listlessly across three miles of brown water, rolling athwart our hawse in short white-capped waves, to Galveston Point and Fort Magruder, with the Confederate banner streaming above it. To the left is the long white sand-beach in front of the town, along which are continually strolling parties to watch the Yankee men-of-war, or occasional horsemen, exercising their steeds. Behind the sand strip rise the red roofs and spires of the city, then numbering but a few thousand souls, and to the right the smoke-stacks and rigging of the "Harriet Lane," the "Matagorda" and "Isabel," all loaded with cotton, waiting a favorable moment to run out. Along the coast, stretching in a line ten miles long, were the vessels of the division, eight in number, just far enough apart and far enough from the flag-ship to be reached by signals by night or day.

The current coming out of Galveston bay here meets the coast stream from the east, and the result

is a long roll which gives the vessels a steady sway that used at first to drive us nearly frantic, but which, as one grew accustomed to the motion, became as essential to our slumbers as an infant's lullaby. In-board, the white decks of the ships glittered in the hot sun, scored by brass tracks for gun carriages and dotted with piles of solid shot, standing handily in racks near each piece. Jack tars sat sailor fashion between them, looking over ditty boxes, making or mending clothing, or spinning interminable yarns. An occasional officer moved slowly about the deck, clad in white trowsers and undress jacket, generally bringing up under the top-gallant fore-castle, our smoking-room. The watch officer paced backward and forward the starboard side of the quarter-deck, and to port the midshipman of the watch and an old quarter-master kept sharp lookout for signals from the gunboats on station, and upon the enemy ashore. Below, the captain—flag-officer by reason of seniority—kept solitary state in his cabin; the ward-room officers made themselves snug just forward, and the warrant officers and the engineers were in the steerage, one step further forward.

The ordinary routine of ship life was rigidly observed on board, for we were flag-ship, and must set an example. No cigar or pipe could be lit outside the captain's cabin, the "old man's" quarters, as we called them, except away forward—some three hundred feet on our ship; and many were the growls about so confounded a nuisance, as we called it. But our captain, George F Emmons, was an officer of the old school, and while scrupulously polite to all hands, and the kindest hearted commander in the squadron to his men, old "Pop Emmons" as they affectionately called him, enforced rigidly every detail of regulation regarding all points of etiquette, uniform, etc. With two exceptions, all on board were regular officers, with long naval schooling; but the longer a man stays in the service, the more confirmed growler he becomes, and on that tiresome duty, every little matter assumes giant proportions to annoy. Yet, after all, there must be some escape valve for condensed irritation, and it may be that finding fault with what is inevitable, without the smallest idea of resisting further than words, is as little harmful as any other form.

Mr. Barton, who succeeded Mr. Spencer as executive officer after the Mobile fight, had recently returned from three years' duty in the China seas, where, as first lieutenant of the "Wyoming," he took part in the attacks upon the Japanese forts and gunboats, for which the United States afterwards paid rich compensation. His stories about the daimios or native princes, and the ludicrous anecdotes he told of their methods of fighting, whiled away many a weary hour in ward-room or under the top-gallant forecastle.

Upon the "Lackawanna" there were many musical geniuses, and we organized a very good chorus for Sunday services, which made an effective part of the worship. Perhaps few hours were more pleasantly passed than those occupied in practising chants or in arranging parts for church service. At ten every Sunday morning, the church pennant was set, and the slowly tolled bell passed forward the invitation to all the men to attend who wished. Presently some two hundred would come aft and cluster in picturesque groups about the guns—the marines, in full dress uniform, drawn up in line to port. Having

no chaplain, for in those days there were but few afloat, the captain would read the service to the accompaniment of the swashing waves. Bared heads reverently returned the responses, and voices husky with many a salt sea gale joined heartily in the simple hymns which we chose for them. Although Jack is usually a profane man, always a rough man, and, frequently a drunken man ashore, the service of the church had always an excellent influence. All the rest of the day would feel the benison of the prayers; and the difference between the flag-ships and the gun-boats, where no such service was practicable, was noted by the men on board of us with great pride. "Our officers give us full rations of church, d'ye see, and we are none the worse for it," they would say

There were two bright points in our life to be kept well in view—one the chase after the blockade runners, with its possibilities of rich reward of prize money; the other, our occasional visits to New Orleans for necessary repairs, and perchance to expend some of the money accumulated during months of hermitage at sea.

On the morning of the 20th of February, while

lying quietly in my berth, reading, there came from on deck the quick, loud order from the officer on watch, "Stand by the cable ! Steamer close aboard ! Slip !" And as the heavy iron chain slid with a splash into the water, four bells in the engine-room started the ship ahead fast, and with "Hard-a-port !" away we went. In less time than I have written these words, I was on deck with almost every one else, and saw a small side-wheel steamer flying past us with a most extraordinary speed. Our long vessel took several minutes to turn around, and in that time the little steamer was a mile away, going so fast as to make the shots we sent after her as harmless as rain-drops. When we got fairly under way, and the sailing master had his course giving him "direct for Morro Castle Light," we knew we were in for a long chase. With our glasses we could plainly see the piles of cotton bales on deck, and, from the torrents of black smoke pouring from her funnels, understood the desperate efforts she was making to escape. Gradually, in spite of our utmost endeavors, she drew away from us, and, while all hands were speculating on

how many bales she had on board, and dividing the prize money, even arranging how it should be spent, the chances of getting at it were decreasing. All day long we steamed hard after her, and at night lost her in a cloud-bank in the eastern sky

Still, steadily on we went, direct for Havana bay, and, when grey dawn grew out of the night, were rewarded by finding her still in sight. She made another heroic effort to escape, throwing overboard bales of cotton in dozens, hoping, I presume, that the rapacious Yankees would stop and pick them up. But we resisted all temptation, although every bale was worth five or six hundred dollars, and kept after her. About noon she began to slack up, and then it would be hard to describe the excitement aboard us. From the grave old captain to the little messenger boy a dozen years old, all were perched upon the most eligible lookouts—every nerve strained to the utmost—as I have often thought a pack of hounds must feel in chase of a stag. In the engine and fire-room men were working thirty minutes' reliefs, for it was so hot down there that no human being could stand it longer: and the great

furnaces were devouring coal at the rate of three tons an hour. The piston rods rose and fell with quick strokes, and the whole main deck danced so under the vibrating blows of the screw that to stand was difficult. Closer and closer we drew, until the first lieutenant sang out, "Clear away the forward rifle! Train on starboard bow! Luff a little, quarter-master! Fire!" and with a cheery howl the 300-pounder shell started after our prize money. Exploding just a little short, the rain of fragments of that iron messenger upon and around the steamer was so convincing that she gave up at once and hove to until we came up. When we got alongside, a boat was lowered and a lieutenant sent on board for the captain, supercargo and any passengers she might have, who were considered as prisoners and sent North to be confined, while the ship was placed under charge of one of our officers with a prize crew whose duty it was to take her to the nearest admiralty court for condemnation.

When Mr. Jones returned, his account of the state of things aboard was pitiful. Their efforts to escape had been so great that her fire-room crew

were about dead. They had been compelled to work them all steadily, not having men enough to change as we did, and they were lying on deck, several dead—so the lieutenant reported—and others dying. A visit on board made at once, resulted in saving all their lives, but the men were never good for anything afterwards. The ship was the "Isabel," from Galveston for Havana, with 600 bales of cotton and no passengers. The captain and supercargo, jolly good fellows, were sent to the North, and the vessel condemned at Key West. My share was \$750, which made a nice day's work and a promise of many a nice day's play

February 22d was greeted on the blockade with as much form and ceremony as possible. The ship was dressed from stem to stern in many colors. From each mast-head floated an immense national ensign; from the jack-staff on the bowsprit the Union Jack; strung between the masts were parti-colored signal flags, making the ship quite gay. At noon, the usual national salute was fired, and in the ward-room many a bottle joined in the fusilade. In the afternoon, Captain Erben, of the gunboat "Pinola,"

came on board and reported the capture of a privateer schooner at Matagorda. After his official report to the flag officer, the captain came down into the ward-room and told us the story, which was one of cool daring and steady courage that might well have served as a foundation for a romance, had not the service developed so many gallant acts that no one could well be chosen as the brightest. It was thus: The schooner had been lying inside the bay for several weeks, arming and fitting out with sea stores and awaiting her crew, when she was discovered by the "Pinola's" lookout. Captain Erben at once determined upon her capture, and organized a night boat expedition to cut her out. When the boat reached the bar at the entrance of the narrow river, in the thick darkness of a foggy night, the surf was so heavy that they failed to get in until after three attempts. Finally they succeeded, baled out, and with muffled oars pulled along close to shore, until the sound of a sentry's challenge within twenty yards warned them to look out. The officer's night-glass made out a rebel battery camp, with three guns trained upon the channel, and a sentry pacing his

beat close to them. With stern silence and suspended oars, they waited, undiscovered, until the sentry was out of sight, and once more pulled for the schooner, which they found was lying close to a wharf, to which she was made fast, under the guns of another battery of six howitzers, whose muzzles shone in the light of a camp fire burning near. Undismayed by the fearful risk, the brave men ran their boats alongside, sprang over the low bulwarks, and with revolver and cutlass enforced the utter silence which was their only chance of escape. Only nine men were found on board, including the captain, who were so utterly surprised and frightened at the sudden and unexpected attack of an enemy whom they believed ten miles away, instead of inside Matagorda bay, close to a camp of Confederate soldiers and under the guns of a battery, that they made not the smallest resistance, only begging their captors, for God's sake, to get away as soon as possible, or all hands would be blown out of the water together. The ensign in command coolly cut the lines, and she swept noiselessly out into the current, past the guns and out of the harbor with the strong

ebb tide, never disturbing a single "reb." Unfortunately she grounded on the bar, and the ensign, not daring to remain until daylight, set her on fire, blew her up, and came safely off to his skip. The consternation of the rebels in the morning, and their futile rage may, perhaps, be better imagined than described.

The next morning we got the anchor and stood on our way down the coast to Pass Cavallo. Leaving Velasco behind, where we saw several cotton laden schooners, but caught none, the engines were stopped, fires banked, and all sail made. All day we glided on at six miles an hour, the ship looking like a picture, covered with canvas and swaying to the gentle swell of the inky water ; for I can compare the appearance of the sea hereabouts to nothing else than blue ink—deep, transparent blue, changing to a living green where the ship's bow quickly divided its glassy surface, and to a creamy white where the bubbles in the wake crushed each other in their whirling race after the rudder. At night it is so lit by phosphorescent insects, of which the number is incalculable, that we seemed to sail in heaven's clear vault, rather than on the Mexican Gulf; and the

"Milky way" was beneath our keel and over our heads at once, sparkling both with glittering, flashing stars. Ah ! on such nights as this, it is easy to account for the deep love the votaries of the sea bear their glorious mistress, the devotion with which they cling to her, fickle though she be.

Arriving off Brazos Santiago, or Point Isabel, we found the national colors flying over the only point upon the whole Texan coast where the national government holds sway. About 2,000 men formed the garrison, under command of Col. Jones, Thirty-fourth Indiana volunteers, who reported that crowds of Mexicans were coming daily to the fort, asking for protection from the French, who held Mexico with bayonets already trembling. Here a report also reached us that our consular flag at Matamoros had been hauled down by Mejia, the French general, the consul given three days to leave the country, under penalty of being hung, and his personal effects confiscated. This requires investigation ; and, ordering the "Seminole" to join us, we are away for the Rio Grande to look into the matter. As Cortinas, the Mexican who sold out to Maximilian, and, not re-

ceiving his money, with true Mexican instinct, immediately joined the other side, was marching with a large force upon Mejia, who had but one thousand French soldiers, we suspected that there would be little left for us to do when we arrived, beyond hoisting the flag again. Off Bagdad, a little village at the mouth of the river, we found an immense fleet of vessels of all nations, awaiting cargoes of cotton or unloading cargoes of war stores. Of course, all this is meant for the Confederate forces, but it goes by lighters up to Matamoros first, and from that neutral town into Texas. Far above the forest of masts around, towered the lofty spars of the French frigate "Rhone," and close to her was the English sloop-of-war "Petrel," neither of which ships could compare in beauty with our own—even the Swede and German merchant captains around calling us "the lovely Yankee frigate." Speaking both Spanish and French, Captain Emmons sent me in a boat to Mejia's head-quarters, to demand explanations as to the consul. The general received me with much dignity and politeness, seated in front of his adobe house, smoking a long cigar, and surrounded by a numerous

staff, all of whom wore some French uniform. He promptly denied the story about any insult being offered to either flag or consul, and stated that he left of his own free will, telling him, the general, that he was merely going upon an excursion. With this reduced to writing, I returned on board, and we soon got under way again, bound eastward.

Next morning, just at daylight, I was on deck for a bath—and in the tropics a cool sea-bath from the hose while the decks are being washed down, is a delicious bracer—when the cry, so startling always, came ringing aft, "Man overboard!" Next the orders from the officer of the deck, "Let go the life buoy! Clear away the starboard quarter boat! Stop her! Lower away there," all at once, and as every man knew exactly what to do, the orders were executed with such speed that the boat was far astern, close to the life buoys, before five minutes. If the man had been there he would have been picked up before he was thoroughly wet through, but, in falling, he had caught a rope trailing from a bow port and hung on so well that, although the ship was going eleven knots, and his hands were badly

torn, he was hauled aboard by his grip, though almost exhausted. A good swig set him up again, and he was none the worse for his bath.

What a life is a sailor's! When quiet had been restored after the preceding episode, the unlucky man, going forward amongst his messmates, was greeted with such a storm of abuse and ridicule as a "Lubberly son of a sea cook;" "A blasted landsman, with hayseed in his hair," and other choice epithets, that he slunk away from the men who would have periled their lives for his an hour before, abashed and ashamed. It is always good-humored, however, this abuse of Jack, and corresponds to the more gentlemanly growling of the officers aft.

Occasionally we were martyrs to that terrible disease common among men who spend months at sea—far from home—far from the refining influence of women—far from land with its changing pictures. For the sea is always the same *in esse*—whether at rest or in angry commotion, and its monotony at times becomes simply terrible. This malady is known as land sickness—*terralgia*—to coin a word. It comes on insidiously in dreams, when one's sleep-

ing ears conduct to a brain awake the rippling music of rivulets between their grassy banks, the rustling of June breezes in leafy trees, and the glad song of free birds. Then to wake and hear but the steady swash of water six inches from one's head, and realize that only a dream has given an hour of shore, begets a desire so ardent as to grow almost to a mania, to step again on dry land, to smell the earth, to fill the lungs with other than salt air, or to stretch out again upon some green bank and watch the summer sun filtering streams of light through thick foliage overhead. Occasionally this becomes a real disease, and the victim must either get away or his mental poise is destroyed. More than once, upon our long tour of service, lasting over six months this time, were the surgeons of the fleet compelled to invalid men and send them home without other discernible cause than this.

Sitting in a bow port one day, listlessly watching a fish-line trailing aft in the strong current, I was amused at the *sang froid* of a sailor who had been sent down on the great anchor to make fast a fall around the flukes to haul it up by—to eat it, as the

term is—when it was hanging down in such a manner that every pitch of the ship plunged it deep into the water, and each roll threw it against the side with a heavy thump. The man, who was captain of the forecastle, quietly clambered down the stock of the anchor, and, seated on one of the flukes, proceeded about his work as coolly as if on deck; while at regular short intervals he was totally submerged, alternating his dips with a rousing bump against the ship. It didn't seem to annoy him in the least, although he must have been half an hour at the job—and the water was quite cold. But Jack takes naturally to water, and goes into it as comfortably as a duck.

Once in a while, some petty offence graver than words—some play of fisticuffs or petty larceny—would call for punishment, and the culprit was submitted to what was called “a summary court-martial.” These were always carried out with as much form and ceremony as possible, to impress the men with the consciousness that stern law reigned at sea as well as ashore, and the certainty that no offender would be unjustly punished or condemned without a

fair trial. In hot weather, a portion of the quarter deck was curtained off with flags for the court room, and furnished with a table, chairs, a naval code, the articles of war, a book or two of common law, and a Bible. The order detailing the court specified the presiding officer, the senior in rank, and the judge advocate, usually a staff officer, with a fair knowledge of naval rules and rulings. A sentry was detailed from the marine guard, and guarded the court room from all intrusion. As the members of the court, in full uniform and with side arms, took their seats, a pennant was hoisted, indicating what was going on, and the accused brought in by the master-at-arms. He was allowed to choose counsel, or, if he wished, an officer was assigned to act as such. Then matters proceeded regularly, sworn witnesses being heard on both sides, and the court cleared for deliberation. When all were satisfied, the members were asked their verdict by the judge advocate in inverse order of rank, the majority governing. In no court-martial that I ever saw, was there any final difference of opinion amongst the members ; nor do I recall a single instance where the

prisoner found fault with his sentence. I believed then, and have seen no reason to change my opinion since, that a court-martial is the fairest, squarest tribunal that was ever constituted.

It used frequently to happen that blockaders running in of a dark, stormy night, would miss the difficult channels into Galveston and run aground on the bar. In that case, as soon as it was light enough some of the fleet would steam within range and shell her until she was destroyed, or until the rifled guns of the fort would get their range and drive them off. I remember very well a similar occurrence one morning. The lookout discovered, the moment it was light enough to make out the shore, a pretty steamer aground on the outer bar, close in shore. As we were nearest we got up anchor and went in to burn her, but before we could get her range, the fort got ours, and a few two-hundred pound Armstrong shells spoiled our fun. It wasn't worth while to risk one man's life, to say nothing of our ship, for a blockader, and we hauled off again.

All day long, we saw boats plying between the vessel and the shore, laden with cargo and men.

Towards night, the captain decided to send in a boat expedition to cut her out, giving the command to Mr. Allen. After a nasty night's work we got back to the ship next morning tired out and beaten. When the boats were manned and armed, we pulled in for the bar, leaving the ship at ten o'clock, with five miles to go. Everything was quiet until we got close aboard her, and the men were loosening their cutlasses and pistols in their belts for a rush aboard, when we were caught sight of by a vigilant lookout. He hailed sharp and loud, "Boat ahoy!" No reply, and every man bent forward to his oar. "What boats are those?" came next, instantly followed by a volley of rifle shots, and a couple of blue lights were touched off, whose brilliant fire made everything around as clear as daylight. They had, it seems, anticipated our attack, and put a company of riflemen from the fort on board, who opened on us at twenty yards' distance. Well, to say that we left that vicinity instant, is gospel. Just how we managed to do it I cannot tell, for the air was full of buzzing bullets, which struck the boats, the oars, the men, and seemed so thick that no one ex-

pected to get out clear. But at last we pulled out into darkness and counted casualties. Only three men were hit, and one officer—none seriously; but there were not four whole oars in the lot, and the boats were badly shot up. Next morning, at general quarters, Captain Emmons publicly thanked the men who were in the boats for their coolness. The blockader was named the "Lark."

On the 10th of March, 1865, the naval head-quarters at New Orleans received a telegram from the United States consul at Havana, to the effect that the famous rebel ram "Stonewall Jackson" had arrived at that port from Nassau, and sailed again, bound for Galveston. Ever since the "Alabama" had sunk the "Hatteras" almost within our reach, there had been sore feelings aboard the "Lackawanna" at not having a hand in that affair, and the news of this formidable cruiser's approach was hailed with delight. On one of the hottest nights I ever saw, we got our anchor, sent down light upper spars, and started on a scouting cruise after her. All hands kept the brightest kind of a lookout, and the reports from the different watch stations came

aft with quick promptness as the bell struck the half hours. About noon the next day, being then somewhere off Sabine Pass, the lookout aloft reported a full-rigged brig, under studding sails, standing along toward us. As this was the rig of the "Stonewall," we thought we were in for a fight, but she turned out to be an innocent army transport. The cruise continued until the 22d, when, having seen nothing of our antagonist, we ran into Southwest Pass for news, and were told by the pilot that Jeff. Davis had been captured, and the "Stonewall Jackson" surrendered to the Spanish government at Havana. And we agreed that this made a far pleasanter way of ending the sail than by a fight against such odds as the rebel iron-clad ram.

As we lay at anchor off the Pass, I watched with curiosity and interest the water of the river mix with the sea. Where we lay, some four miles from shore, the line of separation was as sharply drawn as if it were the edge of a thunder cloud against the blue of a clear sky. The pure ocean refused to be contaminated with the foul washings of thousands of miles of dirty shores, and not until coerced thereto by

strong currents and driving winds, would she yield, and then reluctantly. First, a patch of the muddy stream would be chopped off and swallowed, as one takes a pill ; then another and another, until the volumes are equal—the river less and less—and at last, a long way out, the sea resumes its triumphant blue, and the river is no more.

Many a night was spent in fishing, as there are several varieties of the finy tribe hercabout that will only bite in the dark. We caught quantities of sea trout—dry, bony beasts—croakers, little beauties, who would croak like frogs several minutes after coming on deck, and sheepshead, known in every Atlantic water. All these made a most welcome addition to our ship's fare, and I, who was caterer of the mess, was delighted to get them. For, to provide three times a day for twenty-five hungry men, all accustomed to dainty living, is no fool of a task, even where markets are near and good ; but to do the same at sea, from canned goods, ship's rations, and what we bought from the supply steamer, which came monthly from New York, is a very different thing. To hear those men growl sometimes, was

awful. Coming down to a nice dinner of soup—that was easy to have, fish, when we could catch them, and a splendid big piece of corned beef or boiled pork, with dried fruit dessert or some good pudding, and then to listen was enough to disgust any caterer. “Oh, confound this salt horse, Doctor; can’t you do better than that?” “Same piece that Old Pillgarlic gave us last week.” “Catch me astonishing my stomach with that stuff,” etc., etc., *ad infinitum*, were some of the remarks that greeted me as I came to the foot of the table, my place. Regularly once a week I used to flare up in return, bring the mess books out and slam them down on the table, telling them to choose another caterer and be—hanged. Some way, however, no one else suited them so well, and I remained the housekeeper for over a year.

Once the boys had been howling for sardines at a rate, and with a fiery vigor of language that couldn’t be repeated ashore, and I made up my mind that when the supply ship did come in, they should be satisfied. As her numbers were made out, I collected \$25 from each officer, being the average mess bill for the month, and went on board the “Bermuda,”

where I bought every sardine she had, and not much else, for tea stores. Wasn't that ward-room serene for a week? "Our caterer is all right; he knows what we want." "Poke Pills up now and then, and there's no better fellow going," and such expressions as those had replaced the growls. But in about ten days, sardines began to cloy. First, one would insinuate, "Wonder if the Doctor bought any spiced salmon?" "I'm awfully fond of smoked beef occasionally," and so on, but to no avail, and they had to stick to the sardines, which were never again mentioned in that mess without disgust. It was fifteen years afterwards before I tasted another.

For amusements we had dominoes, chess, and draughts. No cards were allowed on board a man-of-war, and I believe that regulation has remained in force. Occasionally we would get up charades, but the inherent difficulties of place as to wardrobe were very great. It was the greatest fun possible to watch our gunner, Mr. Foster, with a couple of the sail-maker's mates, making up gear for the female parts; and the officer who usually put it on, looked so like a long, lank Hoosier woman, that no one

could keep a straight face. But it soon grew tiresome, for there were no bright eyes to smile applause, no sweet lips to say "bravo"—and we soon relapsed again into our usual do-nothing ways. It is a difficult thing to be absolutely idle for months, without any of the common distractions of *terra firma*—and men of nervous temperament found it hard to learn. Once acquired, however, it is a veritable Sinbad, and fetters many a strong man in iron bands, when he enters the competitive list of civil life.

Long before we left the Texan coast, we were past masters, and the hours, days and weeks went by without a ripple—wasted time. I never knew any one to pursue any steady occupation a week. Books would be produced, a line of study laid out, but it was no use. The deadly laziness that was peculiar to the service of the blockade, would destroy the best intentions and bring them to naught, and *dolce far niente* was the only advice strictly followed aboard. One officer had provided himself before leaving home with an elaborate set of books, plates and instruments for studying the fish of the Gulf, which had never been thoroughly described; but

after a couple weeks' work, during which he made the ward-room smell like an unclean fish market, and earned the objurgations of his messmates, that was abandoned, and with it the only organized attempt at study I ever saw at sea.

One morning, it was the 26th of February, we caught sight of what appeared to be a raft, with some men upon it, paddling in our direction. With an idea of torpedo boats in his head, the captain ordered the ship to be got under way, and we steamed in to meet it. But it was only some deserters, who had gotten away from the rebel lines, stole wood enough to build a raft of, and sculled out in the night. They were the usual type of Texan rebs—dare-devil looking desperadoes, who had run away because there was no active fighting going. The officer, Lieutenant Pentley, Fifth Texas Heavy Artillery, gave us some items regarding the blockade runners which were worth having. According to his account, there were nineteen steamers running as regularly as possible, bringing in cargoes of war stores, medicines, of which the confederacy was sadly in need, fruit, wines and ice, the last a luxury for

none but millionaires. After the arrival of a steamer, the shops in town would be doing a thriving business for a few days—until the new goods were sold—and then would close doors until the next one came. This made trade a little desultory and uncertain, but the profits were enormous, and more than made up the loss of time. For instance, a Miss Romaine, who came out under flag of truce, told us that a calico gown she wore had cost her \$200 in gold the week before. It will be remembered that a specie basis was maintained in Texas throughout the war, through their proximity to Mexico, and the uninterrupted trade between the two. When a blockade runner got in and unloaded, her cargo of cotton was always ready, and instantly loaded, ready for a start. Then came a period of waiting for a favorable chance to run out—that meaning a stormy, dark night, when the low hulls of the vessels, painted a dirty white, were quite invisible a hundred yards away. At the last moment before dark, the bearings of each man-of-war outside would be carefully taken, and steam got up. This part we could see from our stations, and always had plenty of warning of a

coming attempt. As soon as it was dark they would creep slowly down the channel, over the bar, and then, with every possible pound of steam and the greatest speed, would make a dash for our line. All we could hear would be the beat of paddles upon the water—but sound in darkness is so deceptive that no one can tell from which direction it comes, and as nothing could be seen, we usually kept perfectly still and let them go. Indeed, at the speed with which they were going, even if we had seen them, only a shot could have overhauled them—our clumsy blockaders, never. Vast sums of money were made in this way, the profits of a single trip more than covering the entire cost of the vessel.

A Nassau merchant who was largely in the trade, told me a couple of years ago, that three successful voyages had netted him £100,000, after paying all the enormous expenses. When you consider that a blockade runner captain was paid \$5,000 for each round trip, and the crew in proportion, you may form some idea what those were. And there was scarcely any danger in the business. When one was caught, a rare occurrence, the only punishment for

the officers was imprisonment North—from which powerful influence freed them promptly—and for the men, none at all. They took their chances of a stray shot now and then, it is true, but soon came to look upon those as amusing rather than dangerous.

During the months of July and August, when the summer heats are at their maximum, the occurrence of heavy thunder storms was a matter of daily happening, usually beginning about 4 p. m., with the appearance, on a clear blue sky, of scattered masses of cirro-cumulus clouds, which joined into one with marvellous rapidity, and instantly darkness would prevail. The rain came in torrents, accompanied by very peculiar discharges of electricity. No long, ziz-zag lines of flame, cleaving the clouds in different directions, but single fire-balls, following each other every second, darting straight from the sky to the sea, with a hiss like an enormous shell, and exploding as they struck with a sharp report. The thunder never came in peals, muttering and rolling for several seconds, but staccato, in quick concussions, distinctly separate, and of such immense volume of sound as to stun men and make the good

ship quiver in every timber. Balls of fire would perch upon the trucks and remain during the whole uproar, which we finally grew so accustomed to as to call it our "electric matinee," and to count upon its appearance with confidence.

Saturday night was always celebrated in some way. Sometimes it would be musical, with a series of songs and choruses, sometimes a story night, when the Arabian Nights would be cast far into the shade, and again we would play at some game of words. Anything requiring much action was out of the question, owing to the ceaseless roll of the ship, which barely allowed one to keep his feet when careful, to say nothing of running about. Always were the dear ones at home tenderly remembered this night. No liquor was at that time permitted on board a man-of-war, outside the hospital stores ; but we managed a very nice bowl of punch, with wines of different kinds, which were allowed, and the last toast was ever "sweethearts and wives." With uplifted glasses we stood for a moment, and each man's soul went back to his dear home and beloved ones so far away, and carried a benison on its wings.

After several months of such existence as this, the talk in ward-room and steerage was constantly of getting into port, and once more treading firm ground. Everything on board grew more and more uncomfortable, the sea rations more unwelcome, and the salt air, which was so delicious in its purity at first, was now but the atmosphere of a prison. There were only two apparent ways of bringing the cruise to an end—either the disabling of the machinery, or an epidemic of contagious disease. The latter being too terrible to ever think of, much less hope for, the former was the only chance, and I don't think that any officer aboard passed the open engine-room hatches on his way fore and aft, without casting an eager glance below to see if, perchance, something might not be going wrong. But our engineers were skillful and the machinery good,—and there seemed to be no hope in that direction.

One evening a party of us were sitting smoking in the bright moonlight, yarning as sailors will about scenes ashore with maidens fair and sweethearts true, when we once again fell to discussing ways and means to get there. After an unusually long inter-

val of hopeless, gloomy silence, the chief engineer remarked in a casual, careless way, "Curious, isn't it, what soft metal is put into shaft boxes." As all eyes were bent eagerly upon him, for the chief usually meant more than he said, he went on. "Singular, too, how easy it is to cut it. Now, if a rope should be trailing overboard this evening when I turn the engines over, and should get foul of the screw, it would probably work up into the box and cut the metal out, and then we should have to get out of here quick." All hands drew a long breath, but said not a word. Now, singularly enough, at eight bells that very night, it was dark and rainy, and the mizen-panker sheet got overboard—rolled there, I suppose—got foul of the shaft, and not only cut out the metal box, but broke off one blade of the propeller. So, of course, our cruise was over, and the next afternoon we got up the anchor and squared away under sail for Southwest Pass and New Orleans. To speak of the slow progress under canvass, and the crippled screw, of the sail up the wide river, past orange groves and piney woods, whose sweet perfume was new life—past the Head of the

Passes and the dirty little village of Belize, until we arrived off St. Joseph street, and of our wild delight at once again getting on *terra firma*, does not come within the scope of the title of this paper ; and yet they all made part of our blockade life.

Now, as I lay down my pen and relegate to the past the memories I have evoked from the vasty deep, I see in every direction through our broad land the goodly fruits of those months of warlike activity, of tedious watching, even of occasional inglorious defeat. In the South, prostrated as she was by the strife, there is steadily growing a sentiment of faith in the common country, and of loyalty to the common flag, which will, in time, blot out all rancor, obliterate all hate, and make us one in heart as we are in bond. This cannot be expected soon. This, and perhaps the succeeding generation, must pass from the scenes of action before the last drop of bitter blood can disappear, before the Southerners will cease to date all important occurrences "so long after the war." But in the future, I can see no shadow of parting between us, and know that some day the whole world will turn with reverence and

pride to the vast empires of the West, the glorious American republic, as the exponent of right, an asylum for the oppressed, and the defender of universal liberty.

